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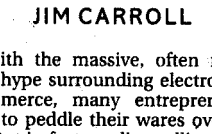
Is on-line selling for you?



E-BIZ

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With the massive, often ridiculous hype surrounding electronic-commerce, many entrepreneurs are rushing to peddle their wares over the Internet. But in fact, on-line selling is not for everyone.

Before you decide to pursue the concept of an Internet store as a business strategy, you should carefully assess its potential.

First, be realistic about the possibility for success. You may have a product or service that people simply will not buy through the Internet. While there are many success stories of ventures selling books, music and travel services over the Internet, there are also several examples of items that just didn't generate on-line business.

It is all too easy to fall into the trap of believing that all you have to do is establish an on-line store, sit back and wait for the riches of this modern-day gold rush to fall into your lap. That won't happen for a lot of companies and many products.

Second, consider whether the people who are most likely to buy your product or service actually use the Internet. Survey several of your existing customers to see whether they are on-line, and whether they would consider buying your product or service over the Internet. This is an important bit of research to do — clearly, an on-line store will be useless if the demographic you are trying to reach isn't hooked up to the Internet, or isn't willing to shop there.

Third, understand that a big part of a successful Internet retail strategy involves winning the trust of people who visit your on-line store. They have to be persuaded that you run a real business that will ship them the goods and that the transaction will be secure (in other words, that there isn't a risk that their credit card information will be stolen or misused). If you do go ahead, put a page on your Web site that provides them the assurance they need. Look at the article on building consumer confidence (**www.ecommercetimes.com/small_business/strategy/story-3-a.shtml**) to get an idea of what information you should include on the page.

On-line selling definitely works for certain types of products, particularly those that are very specialized. Poke around the Internet and you can see people selling some fascinating stuff.

There's one fellow in Scotland who will sell you a case of beer with your own personalized label and ship it anywhere in the world (**www.lugton.co.uk**). A small company in Fergus, Ont., sells pajamas made out of the same material used for flannel blankets (**www.whiteflannel.com**). A man in New Brunswick sells custom-built boats in a bottle, based on pictures that are sent in (**user.fundy.net/fpweb/index-2.htm**).

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